Opening Statement of
The Honorable Tom Feeney, Ranking Republican Member
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
NASA's Space Shuttle and International Space Station Programs: Status and Issues

July 24, 2007

Thank you Mr. Chairman for holding today's important hearing on the Space Shuttle and International Space Station (ISS). We will examine the interrelationships between these programs and gain insight about supporting and operating ISS in the post-Shuttle era.

As you know Mr. Chairman, many of my constituents at the Kennedy Space Center prepare Space Station components and the Space Shuttle for launch. I understand you are considering a hearing later this year to examine NASA's Shuttle to Constellation transition planning. I look forward to working with you on this hearing. We can't repeat past mistakes – like the Apollo to Shuttle transition -- where America frittered away hard-earned spacefaring skills.

NASA faces many challenges, both now and in the future. Chief among them is to safely maintain the International Space Station, support its research agenda, and ensure the safety of the crews, while transitioning to the new Orion spacecraft and Ares launch vehicles. To do this, NASA intends to increase reliance on our international partners and the new Commercial Orbital Transportation System capability (COTS). We need to better understand the implications of this strategy.

In the post-Shuttle era, COTS will hopefully provide a viable replacement of the Shuttle's capability to delivery cargo and crew to ISS. Establishing private commercial providers to perform these tasks would bring a new and much desired dimension to spacefaring. NASA may also increase its reliance on international partners. The Russians will continue to play a significant role. But NASA also plans to use the European Automated Transfer Vehicle (ATV) that will have roughly three times the cargo capability of the Russian Progress. Development of the ATV has been delayed. But the first one is currently being shipped to its French Guiana launch site with launch scheduled for January 2008. If we become more reliant on the international community, I want to understand the effect of the ITAR (International Traffic in Arms Regulation) restrictions on NASA's ability to work with our international partners.

As NASA works to complete the ISS, it should fully examine the capabilities for exploration-related, as well as non-exploration-related ISS research. The success of ISS as a National Laboratory depends in part on maintaining sufficient research capabilities needed to prepare humans for long duration lunar missions.

I remain vigilant about the temptation to backslide into pre-Columbia behavior – burdening NASA to do too much with too little. Demands on NASA must be tempered. Furthermore, this Administration and Congress must deliver the resources needed to complete what has been assigned. That means adequate budgets in FY08 and beyond. I'm concerned about this year's appropriations. The $18 million reduction from NASA's

request for ISS reserves and the $85 million reduction in needed replacements for the Tracking and Data Relay Satellite System represent a fiddling at the margins that cumulatively invites more serious consequences.

When the world thinks of NASA, it envisions human space exploration. We are once again laying the foundation to explore beyond low Earth orbit. Human spaceflight is one of the most inspirational undertakings we do as a nation. Indeed, other nations now strive to emulate our successes because they recognize the great national prestige that accompanies human space exploration.

NASA often makes the difficult look easy, but significant challenges await. I welcome today's distinguished panel and thank you for taking the time to help us better understand and prepare for those challenges. In particular, I want to welcome Bill Gerstenmaier and thank you for your dedicated service.